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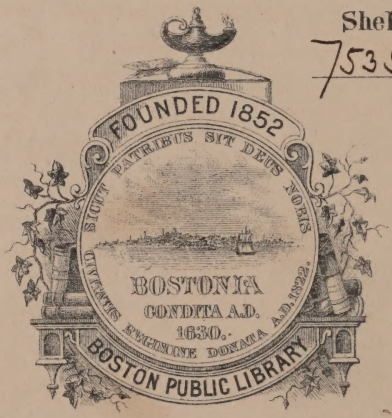

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THE

DIVISION BECAUSE OF CHRIST,

BEING A

REPORT TO HIS PARISH

OF THE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE RECENT CONFERENCE IN NEW YORK.

By JAMES W. THOMPSON, D.D.

Jamaica Plain, Mass.

[Published by Request.]

BOSTON:
NICHOLS & NOYES
117 Washington St.
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[Reprinted from the Monthly Religious Magazine.]

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D. R.
to
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Feb. 7, 1894.

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DIVISION BECAUSE OF CHRIST.

THERE is excellent authority for saying that during the life-time of Jesus "there was a division among the people *because of him;*" and it is well known that such division has continued through every age of his Church, without ever being once closed up, down to this day. Soon after his death, a division arose upon the question whether he had a real body, or was only a spirit, — an apparition; another, somewhat later, whether he was of the "same" nature with God, or of a "similar" nature, — a question decided, after days of debate, by the Council of Nice in favor of the former proposition; another, whether he had conscious existence prior to his birth; another, whether he was born as other men are, or had but one human parent; another, whether he was actually God, — possessing all the attributes of the Eternal Being, — or the Son, the Image, the Word of God.

But, comprehended in all these divisions, of whatsoever name or date, has been found this one faith, that he was in some special sense the "Sent of God;" that he acted under some special authority from God; that he was a Teacher who received special illumination from God; and that he gave to the world a religion above the power of man to improve.

In this, Catholics and Protestants — "all who profess and call themselves Christians" — have been, until a compara-

tively recent date, in substantial agreement. When, during the last century, what is called Rationalism appeared in Germany, this unity was broken, and a new division arose upon the question, *whether Jesus had any authority beyond that which his natural intuition of truth and his unimpeachable goodness gave to his word.* To the rationalist what Jesus taught rests wholly on its own merits, when it has passed the ordeal of reason, borrowing no weight from anything alleged to be supernatural in his life. It is, therefore, as open to criticism, to be controverted as freely, as properly subject to be set aside by man's judgment, as the teachings of Confucius, of Plato, of Seneca, or of any modern oracle in religion.

It is not quite a half century since rationalism began to excite attention in this country; but within that period of time a good deal of interest has been awakened in it, and in some of its forms — for it has many — it has been gradually gaining ground with a small class of scholars, ministers, and their adherents. Among the earliest to receive it, and to give to it a brilliant start, were Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Mr. George Ripley, both then clergymen of Boston; the former, a man of pre-eminent genius and of singular grace and sweetness of life; the latter, a philosophical thinker of fine gifts and comprehensive erudition.

After these, in the next decade, came Theodore Parker, who did more than both the others, and, I may say, than all others have done since, to propagate rationalism. A large-souled man, a man of rare powers and thoroughly in earnest, a man unsurpassed in his moral discriminations and of a very devout mind, a man abundant in labors of humanity and mercy, a strong-handed reformer of the type of John the Baptist. But, having said this, it must be said, on the other hand, that he added nothing to our theology worth having; that, instead of carrying us forward from Channing,

— as his friends claim, — he went back from Channing as far as he failed to agree with him, towards the philosophies which Christianity displaced.

I have said these things, and shall say a little more in the same line, as preliminary to the Report which I am about to make of the proceedings of the "National Conference of Unitarian and other Christian Churches" in New York.

"There was a division" in that Conference, as is now well known, "because of him."

In this country, rationalists have lately taken the name of Radicals; but it is only the name that is changed. It is but simple justice to say here that Radicalism has a positive side which is humane, devout, spiritual, and worthy of all praise. But it is its negations upon which division has grown up, and with which we are at present concerned. What, then, does Radicalism deny? 1. It denies any special authority in Jesus Christ as a Teacher sent from God. 2. It denies that Christianity depends for its validity, as an instituted religion, on the books of the New Testament. 3. While it believes that a singularly gifted man, named Jesus, taught the people of Judea much excellent moral and religious truth, — more, perhaps, than any other man has ever done, — and that he lived a very blameless, unworldly, God-loving life, it denies that he was such a person as either Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John has represented. 4. It denies that the accounts ascribed to these writers are genuine, and asserts that they are, in the main, fabrications of an age posterior to the evangelists, or memoirs for which the writers were indebted chiefly to the fertility of their imaginations, vivified by a strong religious sentiment. 5. While believing that Jesus Christ suffered death under Pontius Pilate, it denies that "he rose again from the dead, according to the Scriptures." 6. It denies that he had any thought or intention of founding a universal Church.

7. It denies that the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper enter into Christianity as an integral part, or have an essential abiding in it; and so, in general, it dispenses with their observance.

Such is Radicalism on its negative side. I believe I have done it no injustice. Fifty years ago there probably did not exist a church of any denomination, liberal or orthodox, in America or in Great Britain, which would not have regarded and condemned such denials as overt Infidelity!

There are six men of undoubted sincerity, of distinguished ability and learning, devout men "who fear God and work righteousness," who constitute the main strength of the radical wing. These are D. A. Wasson, John Weiss, O. B. Frothingham, Samuel Johnson, William J. Potter, Francis E. Abbot, — all ministers. There may be two or three others, somewhat younger, who should be added to this list; but if these six should change their position from left to right, there would not be much remaining. These are the men through whom Radicalism is felt as a power in this country at the present time.

It was necessary that I should enter into these explanations in order that the bearing might be seen of much that occurred in the Conference, which, to a stranger to the grounds of our division, would appear puerile and absurd.

It is also necessary, in order to give something like completeness to the Report, to refer very briefly to the action of the first Conference in New York, and of the second in Syracuse.

It is not to be denied that the Committee, entrusted with the responsibility of making arrangements for the first Conference, did desire the presence in it of the Radical brethren; did constrain those who were reluctant, as not really belonging there, to come in; did give them to understand that they would be cordially welcomed, and that nothing offensive to

them would be introduced. It should be said, however, on the side of the Committee, that probably not one of them ever dreamed of organizing the Conference on any other than a distinctly Christian basis, or that any body would expect or wish them to.

The two great things accomplished in that body were, 1. The exhibition of a quite unexpected *working* power in it; and, 2. The framing and adopting of a Constitution, including a Preamble. I ask attention now to the Preamble, of which so much has been said and written, and also to "Article I." of the Constitution. They are in these words: "*Whereas*, The great opportunities and demands for Christian labor and consecration, at this time, increase our sense of the obligations of all disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ to prove their faith by self-denial, and by the devotion of their lives and possessions to the service of God and the building up of the kingdom of his Son." [This is the Preamble.] "Article I. Therefore, the Christian churches here assembled unite themselves in a common body, to be known as 'The National Conference of Unitarian Churches,' to the end of energizing and stimulating the denomination with which they are connected to the largest exertions in the cause of Christian faith and work."

It is almost incredible that in an assembly composed of ministers and delegates of professedly Christian churches, opposition could have arisen to this Preamble, especially to these phrases in it, "Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ," and "The kingdom of his Son!" Yet opposition, decided and bitter, manifested itself at once. "Some cried one thing, and some another." One said, "It is a creed, and I am opposed to *all* creeds." Another said, "I cannot consent to put the word 'Lord' before the name of Jesus, for I do not acknowledge him as my 'lord and master,' — him nor any other but

God only." Another protested against the idea of our uniting and working "for the building up of the kingdom of his [God's] Son;" maintaining that "the kingdom of God" was enough, and that the Son really had no kingdom. And so it went on, the debate waxing warm on both sides, until the question was taken, and both Preamble and Constitution were adopted by overwhelming majorities.

Let me ask you to notice here an incident which, though it may seem slight, yet, as showing the intention of the Conference, is quite significant. When the Constitution had been adopted article by article, numbering eight, Rev. Mr. Ames, of Albany, moved the addition of a *ninth* section, as follows: "Nothing in this Constitution shall be construed to exclude from representation in this body any church which chooses to co-operate with us in Christian work." After debate, Rev. Dr. HEDGE, perhaps the ablest man in our body, seeing that the word "church" had not a very definite meaning in some minds, and wishing that the Conference should be composed *exclusively* of the representatives of *Christian* churches, moved to amend the resolution by inserting the word "CHRISTIAN" before the word "church"; and the *amendment was adopted.* But the motion for the additional article was not carried.

Prior to this action, — the day before, — the Committee on order of business reported that "The business of the Convention divides itself naturally into two parts. 1. Obtaining information of the present activities, instrumentalities, wants, and opportunities of the denomination. 2. Upon the basis of this information, considering how these activities are to be extended, these instrumentalities increased, these wants supplied, and these opportunities improved." The Committee go on to say, "The reports of the morning and those which remain will sufficiently exhaust the first divis-

ion of our business; and the Committee propose to offer the following Resolutions *as the way to open naturally the second division*," namely, "Considering how these activities are to be extended, these instrumentalities increased, these wants supplied, and these opportunities improved." I quote the second of these Resolutions only, the first having no special relevancy to the matter now before us.

"*Resolved*, That, to secure the largest unity of the spirit, and the widest practical co-operation of our body, it is hereby understood that all *the resolutions and declarations of this Convention*" — mark these words — "are expressions only of its majority, committing in no degree those who object to them, claiming no other than a moral authority over the members of the Convention, or the churches represented here, and are all dependent wholly for their effect upon the consent they command on their own merits from the churches here represented or belonging within the circle of our special fellowship." Nothing is said here of Preamble and Constitution.

Now, I beg you to remember the purpose of this Resolution, as declared by the Committee. It was "to open the way" for the second division above stated: "Considering how our activities are to be extended, our instrumentalities increased, our wants supplied, and our opportunities improved;" and lest any resolutions or declarations of majorities, *looking to these ends*, should be regarded as compulsory in their nature, or as infringing the personal freedom of members or the independence of churches, it was declared that such resolutions and declarations "claimed no other than a moral authority over the members of the Convention, and committed in no degree those who objected to them."

Such is the obvious construction of this now famous Resolution. It had no reference to anything in the Preamble, for the Preamble had not then been reported. It had no refer-

ence to the articles of the Constitution, for surely no organization would be so simple as to declare in advance that its Constitution was binding only on those of its members who agreed to it. It is of necessity binding on all who associate under it, and the Preamble as well. The contrary view would render the Constitution a nullity; for, if a resolution of the Conference can release a part of its members from the obligations of the Constitution, it can release the whole; and what would this be but to abandon the Constitution?

The year following, the Conference met at Syracuse. I was not present, nor have I seen the Report, but I learn that, after debate on a motion to amend the Preamble so as to make its fellowship broader, and to include "other Christian churches," — which amendment was adopted, — this Resolution, altered by inserting the words "including the Preamble and Constitution," was brought forward as a measure of conciliation, and passed with great unanimity. This was a Radical gain. Thus the uneasy were quieted, a degree of harmony was attained, and both wings, with few exceptions, returned well satisfied with the result. I remember how jubilant our dear, lamented James P. Walker, one of the delegates of this church, was, who, though not a Radical himself had a deep and tender friendship for many who were, and, in the largeness of his charity, never wanted any excluded.

Here it was believed by many, perhaps by most, that the subject would rest, and that we should go on and do our work together, if not with unity of faith, yet with something like unity of spirit. We had solved the problem of a house divided against itself and yet standing! It was understood everywhere that for the next two years, certainly, the denomination was safe; there would be no split in it.

Two years went by, and we were summoned — the undivided body — to our third Conference. We had done a good

deal of good work, and there was a great deal more to do. The Council, representing, as they believed, the wishes of the greater part, determined in advance to hold all speculative questions in abeyance, and to confine the Conference closely to *practical* matters. They gave timely notice to this effect in the public papers; but their purpose was frustrated. One of the Local Conferences in this State having voted to bring up the famous Resolution on the ground (I believe) that its terms had not been fairly carried out, and a venerable and excellent minister of the interior of New York, Rev. Mr. May, having expressed a desire to amend that Resolution by an additional clause, it became the duty of the Council, as I understand, to lay the subject before the Conference. Accordingly, two or three weeks before the assembling of the Conference, they gave public notice that it would be brought up. But the apparently trifling fact of *that notice having been given* has, I conceive, an important bearing on the opening act of the Conference, which has been severely criticised, — the sermon of the Rev. Dr. Bellows. Rude and bitter remarks followed the delivery of that sermon. "He had no right," it was said, "to put forth his sentiments upon the questions in issue on such an occasion. It was an attempt to forestall the judgment of the Conference upon them, and its direct tendency was to stir up strife amongst the brethren!"

But, forewarned as we had been that the discussion of the great issues was to be renewed, it was the special opportunity of the preacher — which he did well to improve — to turn the thinking and feeling of the Conference into what he believed to be the only proper channel, and to set forth those views of Christianity which he deemed not merely important, but vital. Would any Radical have done less, or otherwise? And now a word on the sermon itself. I heard it with extraordinary pleasure, and never imagined that any one could feel hurt or

offended by it. To me, in manner, thought, and spirit, it was admirable. But it nettled a good many, and put a sour look into their usually sweet faces. There were audible murmurs; there was much scolding; and this was continued till the last hour of the Conference, and, I fear, is continued even unto this day.

What was it in the sermon which so disquieted these brethren? There are two paragraphs which I suppose created the ferment. The first is as follows: —

"It is in no dread of free inquiry, in no desire to entangle or baffle others' consciences, in no caprice of opinion or fear of what the world will say, that the Unitarian denomination has planted itself, or rather has been planted by its progenitors, upon the great traditions of the New Testament and the historical Church. It is its providential birth-right, its saving instinct, whence alone nutriment for it can proceed. It is from convictions stronger than any formal arguments, from attachments deeper than reasoning, from wants and cravings that will not be denied, that our Unitarian Churches have held their anchorage in the storms of modern scepticism and a devout infidelity, and the moment the question was raised, declared themselves, by a decisive and overwhelming majority, the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The other — it is only necessary to quote a part of it — is found under the head of "Theism and Theists." After describing those who "lean to pure Theism," the sermon proceeds to say, "If their consciences are so tender and their views so advanced that they cannot work with us upon a platform which, without a single other dogma, distinctly avows discipleship of the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is plain that we have come to a boundary which the Unitarian denomination cannot pass. If, as it is claimed, there are thousands of religious people who are outside of so broad a pale as

ours, surely there is room for a new kind of religion. And its apostles may as well go to work at once to occupy the providential field."

Now, since the beginning of the Christian era, has there ever been an assembly of ministers and delegates of churches, in which exception would have been taken to a sermon on the ground that it called the members of it "disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ," and affirmed, by implication, that those who were not "disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ" could not properly be members of it? "But the world moves," I am told. Towards what? That is the question. The ship moves when, driven by fierce winds, she is heading, amidst foaming and flying surf, directly towards the precipitous, rocky shore; but I should not care to be on board, even though I were favored with the company of some of my excellent Radical brethren.

It was quite noticeable that brave, out-and-out Radicals were much less disturbed by the sermon than those tender-hearted, semi-radical friends who were afraid their feelings would be hurt. Mr. Frothingham, their leader, told me he thought it a "grand sermon," and that he "listened to it with pleasure."

A quiet sleep had its usual soothing effect upon jaded nerves, and the Conference came together in the morning for its first day's work, good-natured, buoyant, wide-awake, as though its slumbers had been a baptism of living water.

The day was wholly given to business of the most interesting and important character, consisting of Reports of Committees on subjects previously assigned, detailing what had been accomplished during the last two years, and unfolding plans for future usefulness; and of debates upon them. It was a day to be rejoiced in, — not a cloud without, not a jar within. No one could have told, from anything said, on

which wing the speaker belonged; for, though there were differences of opinion, they did not turn on the Radical question, but on the expediency of measures proposed. These Reports indicated an inspiring ardor in the cause of Truth and the spiritual welfare of man, which it was truly gladdening to witness. After the opening address of the President, Hon. T. D. Eliot, of New Bedford, which was in all respects exceedingly felicitous, came first the Report of the Council, by Rev. E. E. Hale, summing up and bringing under rapid survey the work of the previous two years. And whoever listened to that Report, whatever his bias this way or that, must have felt that we had neither labored in vain nor spent *all* our money for that which is not bread. The Report shows a very considerable increase in the number of churches, there being eighty-three more than were invited to the first Conference. It thinks that the contributions the last year for religious purposes were larger than ever before, though a considerable part of them was for objects not specially belonging to the operations of the Conference, — as for building, enlarging, improving, and adorning church-edifices, and the support of mission chapels. It refers in most encouraging terms to what it calls "People's Meetings" in public halls and theatres, designed to reach the ear, with words of truth and righteousness, of the thousands in our cities who never enter the doors of a church, and who, some for one reason, and some for another, cannot be attracted within them. And it cannot be doubted that such discourses as were preached to the audiences gathered in those places the last season, such prayers as were breathed forth in their presence, such music as stirred their hearts, exerted a refining and Christianizing influence, to inure to the growth and power of the Redeemer's kingdom.

But, while I have full faith in the beneficent influence of these meetings hitherto, who of us does not agree with Dr.

Bellows in saying, that " The churches are our great and steady reliance ? And to make *them* more efficient and attractive is our most practical way of deepening our influence and extending our type of Christianity. If you abandon or weaken the church organization, you will have broken your connection with the tender and holy associations of the Christian religion, and thrown away all the unspeakable wealth of its hereditary sentiment. . . . No; if Liberal Christianity, in her new method, breaks down the regular traditional church institutions, and substitutes other ways, believe me, it will not be a progress but a revolution, and a backward one at that."

The Report makes favorable mention of a new opportunity of Christian work lately opened to us in the Southern States, by lending our aid to the African Methodist Episcopal Church in its missionary labors, and also in carrying on the Wilberforce College for the training of teachers and ministers, which the colored people have already established in Ohio. It may be mentioned here that the Conference was addressed at one of its sessions in a modest but dignified and able manner by two bishops of that church, on the subject of its condition, strength, usefulness, hopes, and of the sort of understanding which, without compromising its ecclesiastical position, it would be glad to enter into with us.

Mr. Hale closed his Report by reminding the Conference of the broad ground on which it had planted itself by adopting the famous Resolution at its last meeting.

Next followed Rev. Mr. Scandlin's Report on the organization and work of the Local Conferences, which was extremely interesting in its details and suggestions. These Local Conferences — which are yet in their infancy — have done, and are destined to do, a great and most needed work, especially in behalf of our feeble churches and in those dismal neighborhoods, alas! too numerous, wherein the altar-fires have

well-nigh gone out. Why, can you believe it? it was stated, when this Report was under discussion, that there was a tier of towns in the southern part of Worcester County, in which not one-sixth part of the inhabitants were connected with any religious society, ever hear the gospel preached, or send their children to Sunday-school! This, within fifty miles of Cambridge and Andover! Nor is this a solitary case. New England is largely a missionary field, not specially for the dissemination of dogmas, but for the infusion into the minds of the people of those vital truths of Christianity without which no community can long keep its place in the civilization of the age.

After this came the Report of Rev. Mr. Ferry, of Peterboro', N. H., showing how these destitute regions might be served by an "Itinerating Ministry." He would have one minister take, say, four parishes under his immediate charge, visiting each of them himself once a month, to preach, and, if possible, organizing lay co-operation, so that on the Sundays of his absence, by help of Service-Books, worship might be conducted without the presence of a minister, and the Sunday-school be kept alive as the seed of a self-sustaining church, one of these days. This Report was received with universal favor, and it is much to be desired that the "American Unitarian Association" should give to its suggestions early attention. To such a work who of us would not gladly lend his aid, and whose heart would not rejoice at witnessing its successful prosecution?

The Conference then listened to an able paper by Dr. Laird Collier, on "Theological Schools," earnestly recommending the removal of the Meadville School to Chicago: upon which I have nothing to say. He was followed by Dr. Gannett, in an eloquent unwritten Report on a proposition to unite the "Boston School for the Ministry," which Mr. Hep-

worth without a dollar of endowment has extemporized into an extraordinary vitality, with the Divinity School at Cambridge. But the Conference, some for one reason and others for another, refused by a large majority to sustain the proposition.

This is a meagre sketch of the first day's work, — a work of which no laborer in it need be ashamed, characterized throughout by a very marked unity of spirit, and proving, as some are ready to say, the practicability of co-operation, for ends distinctively Christian, in a body composed partly of those who believe in the divine authority of Jesus Christ, and partly of those who refuse to own him as their "Lord and Master," and challenge the authenticity and genuineness of the records from which all our knowledge of him is derived. But, after all, is it quite demonstrated? It is one thing to see that a field invites cultivation and is lamentably in need of it, and another to select the seed and find fit laborers. We want to sow with the word and life of Christianity, if we are disciples of Christ. But a laborer offers himself who refuses assent to the Christianity of the New Testament; who is willing that the name of Christ should never be heard in prayer or sermon; and whose sovereign remedy for the ills of the perishing world is this creed: I believe in the immanency of the Divine Spirit in man; in freedom of thought in matters of religion; in "the latest results of criticism;" and in a gospel which is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. Will you send *him*? If you do not, Radicalism will grumble. If you do, the churches which "call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" will justly complain that you misappropriate the money they have given to you, and withhold further contributions. This is the dilemma, and it is but right that our congregations should understand it.

Now, what is to be done? No one denies the right of the

Radicals to their opinions; no one would limit their freedom to disseminate them in all ways that belong to them; no one would call in question their sincerity, nor cast reflections upon their character. But we cannot help them do *their* work, and they know it. We cannot furnish money and men and machinery to assist them in doing what we honestly believe detrimental to the best interests of mankind, inasmuch as it is obstructive, in our judgment, of the progress of "the truth as it is in Jesus." They know we cannot, and some of them have had the manliness to say so. What, then, is to be done? Is there any better way than to conduct all our machinery of "Associations," of "Conferences," of "Theological Schools," and of "Churches" *on the principle that the majority controls*, and so as not to aid in any manner whatever — by publication, by opening of churches, or by support of ministers — the propagation of religious opinions which that majority deem contrary to the word and authority of Jesus Christ? Undoubtedly our "Conference" and our "Unitarian Association" ought to stand as representatives of a fellowship as broad as Christianity — but no broader. By their various instrumentalities it belongs to them to go out into "the highways and hedges" of irreligion, of unbelief, of reverential doubt, of scoffing denial, of godless license of thought and life, not to carry to them more of the same kind of food they have been living on, or to ask to be admitted into their fellowship; but to invite, to urge, and, with all the tender persuasions of the love of God in Christ Jesus, to "*compel*" them — the hungry and thirsty — to come in and take the seats waiting for them at the Master's feast? If they think that this kind of Radicalism is ruin, that it inevitably kills any church that becomes infected with it, that its temporary triumphs are at the expense of the divinest memories and most cherished hopes of thousands of hearts baptized into Christ and feeling that it is through him that they have

come to their comforting rest in God, ought they to lend it the least support or countenance? Nay, ought they not to do what they can, in a fair field and with Christian weapons, to destroy its influence? Instead of cuddling up to it to keep it warm, is it not better for the life of the world that it should be "left out in the cold" till it feels its nakedness, and, taking the garment of Christ all ready for it, puts it on? And, instead of inviting it into their council-chambers, should they not diligently guard those seats against such occupancy, and devoutly thank God when a man so keen-sighted as John Weiss, for example, discovers that it is no place for him, and withdraws?

I speak only for myself. Such is the policy which truth, justice, honor, faithful allegiance to the Head of the Church, demand. If we adopt it, a long and glorious life is before us; the Church of the Redeemer and of the Comforter will be enlarged and made glad through our prayers and labors; and they who shall come after us will enter into a heritage secure in the strength and beautiful in the holiness of the Lord. If we fail to adopt it, we die. No sun of the twentieth century will ever shine on that denomination which has been illustrated by so many immortal names.

Let me now come back to the Conference and to the second day of it, — "the stormy day," it has been called. You will be glad to learn that the storm was of short duration, lasting just three hours and a half, and at no time threatening much harm!

I have already shown you how it happened that the Radical question was introduced.

The majority were disinclined to bring it up. Leading Radicals, also, were willing to let it rest. O. B. Frothingham in his speech, declared himself "sorry that the discussion came up," and said "it came up without his knowledge or

consent." It was introduced by James Freeman Clarke, — not of his own motion, but "by request," in the form of a resolution "which had passed regularly through the Business Committee." He supposed that, as the resolution had been agreed upon by a few of both sides, "who seemed to be somewhat," it would go through the Conference quite unanimously! Before reading the resolution, he made a few prefatory remarks, in his usually grave, unimpassioned way, planting himself strongly and unequivocally upon the Preamble, — for, as an "orthodox Unitarian," he could do no less (and no man ever questioned his fidelity to his convictions), but at the same time avowing his willingness to concede to "the gentlemen who have felt aggrieved by the terms of the Preamble" what he calls "*an explanatory statement* which will relieve them from some real or supposed difficulties in regard to it." "I thank our friends," he says, "for not asking us to alter this Preamble in any particular. They are perfectly willing it should stand as it is. They do not want any alteration. They only want an explanation. And what they want is this, they want the following amendment to the Constitution:" —

"ARTICLE IX. To secure the largest unity of the Spirit and the widest practical co-operation, it is hereby declared that all expressions in this *Preamble* and *Constitution*" — before it was "resolutions and declarations including the Preamble and Constitution" — "are expressions only of the majority, committing in no degree those who object to them, and depending wholly for their effect upon the consent they command on their own merits from the churches here represented, or belonging within the circle of our fellowship; *and that we heartily invite to this fellowship all who desire to work with us in advancing the kingdom of God.*"

The clause in italics is an addition to the Resolution as passed at Syracuse, the substance of which precedes this

clause. Now, had this clause not been added, Dr. Clarke would have been right in saying that all they wanted was an explanatory amendment. But this clause explains nothing. And, moreover, if adopted, it changes the whole design and composition of the Conference. Dr. Clarke says, "We have already done what this clause contemplates." If we have, what need of doing it again? But, though usually very accurate, he is under a mistake here. We have cordially invited into this fellowship "Unitarian and other Christian churches." That invitation goes much farther. It invites all men, all societies, Christian or not, who are willing to work with us for the kingdom of God, — an invitation which would include every Jewish synagogue in the land, which would include any association of mere Theists, which would include the anomalous congregation of which Mr. Abbot was till lately the minister, — a gentleman who has avowed himself not a Christian in the sense of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, — and which would transform the "National Conference of Unitarian and other Christian churches" into a body of Free Religionists, like that which already exists, and of which Mr. Frothingham is President.

Broad as Dr. Clarke is known to be in his theory of fellowship, I do not believe that he has any desire to see such a change in the character of the Conference.

Robert Collyer followed, avowing his acceptance of Jesus Christ as "the Captain of his salvation, his spiritual Leader and Guide," declaring that he had always "*voted against the Preamble;*" but saying, also, that "it did seem to him that the adoption of the proposed article would do away forever any desire on his part to vote down this Preamble!". I think there was a funny twinkle in his eye when he said that, and a pretty broad smile on the face of the assembly. It was so innocent!

Mr. Hale argued with great apparent candor on the same side, but evidently attached very little importance to the question. Mr. Calthrop was jubilant and ecstatic in view of the unifying speeches just made. Then came Dr. Osgood with a new proposition, which cast a sudden cloud over the face of things. He stood, he said, "upon the idea from which our denomination originally grew — the spiritual authority of our Lord Jesus Christ." He would vote for the amendment, provided they would insert these three words, "in Christian faith," so that the clause would read, "And that we heartily welcome to our fellowship all who *in Christian faith* desire to work with us in advancing the kingdom of God." "That is the ground," he adds, "on which I would stand, — that, as a Conference of Unitarian and other Christian churches, we are Christians; we stand on that ground, and we welcome to our fellowship all who, *as Christians*, will work with us." Nothing broader or more generous than this could be desired by a Christian organization, one would suppose.

At this stage of the discussion, when the spirit of the Conference seemed ready to adopt the amendment, Dr. Bellows took the platform under the serious conviction, in which he was joined by many of his brethren, that its passage would open a door so wide as to put in jeopardy the great interests for which the Conference was instituted. He spoke earnestly and forcibly, as is his wont. "I have not the least idea," he said, "of being put constructively out of the Christian Church, or of being in the least degree compromised in my own position and attitude in respect to a positive faith in Christianity, by any action of this Convention." . . . "It is because I am persuaded that you are opening the flood-gates of Infidelity, that you are saying it is of no consequence whether a man believes in the personal authority of the Lord Jesus Christ or no, that it is of no consequence whether we have a

historical church or no, that it is of no consequence whether we believe, individually and personally, or collectively, in the guidance and direction of the Lord Jesus Christ or no, — it is because I believe this that I say these words." In the fervor of an unpremeditated address men cannot stop to cull words and phrases. They can only "speak right on;" and it is likely there are some expressions in this speech which the author, upon cool revision, would qualify. For example, when he says, "I believe in a historic Church which has descended from Jesus Christ; and it is because I see a *secret design* to undermine that Church, to make light of that Church, to distract attention from that Church, that I oppose this change. That, if I know anything, I know to be the *secret* animus of most of those who are opposed to the Preamble, and I believe they are men honest enough to say so." Now, I could not say *all* that. I do not think that with design they are working stealthily to undermine the Christian Church. Whatever their "animus" is, they make no *secret* of it. They are bold, and they are outspoken; and if we do not understand what they mean, it is no fault of theirs. Again, when he says that "the Preamble was adopted for the sake of giving them shelter," I think he mistakes what was in his own mind when he drew it up, for what was in the mind of the Conference when it adopted it. The great majority meant to say that no man who could not come in under that Sign had a right to come in at all. And as to his saying, "We would not shut our doors against" those whose "secret design is to undermine the Church," why, — what sense is there in having a door?

Rev. Mr. Heywood, of Louisville, spoke next. He professed theological agreement with the previous speaker, and great love for him; favored Dr. Osgood's amendment, but declared his intention to vote for the original proposition,

though the amendment should not be carried. He was succeeded by a layman from Chicago, who stated that "this declaration had stood before the Unitarian denomination for three years, *substantially as now*" (a great mistake), and proceeded to argue earnestly in favor of it. Then came Dr. Laird Collier in a speech for the amendment, every sentence of which was received with applause. I will not characterize it, for I have great respect and a certain admiration for that gentleman's chivalrous enthusiasm. You have read the report of what he said. You remember that he exclaimed, "When I took my neck from one dogmatic yoke, it was not for the singular purpose of putting it into another!" (Prolonged applause.) What other? We had no other but that referred to in these words, "Take MY yoke upon you." You remember that he was frank to say, "If it is the temper of this body to refuse to insert this article into its fundamental law, *they may consider me out!*" Now it happened that it *was* the temper of the body to refuse to insert this article into its fundamental law; but I rather think that excellent brother, "conservative of the conservatives," and all the better for that, will live to do a great deal of good work in the Conference yet.

After him came that scholarly gentleman and prince of Radicals, O. B. Frothingham, in a calm, conciliatory, but frank and manly statement of his position, of which afterwards I heard no word but of commendation. Indeed, I am bound to say of all *pronounced* Radicals, that their word, however earnest, was always courteous and brotherly. Mr. Frothingham was in favor of the amendment, not so much on his own account as for the sake of certain young men who, if it were adopted, would probably stay with us; otherwise, they would naturally gravitate into the "Free Religious Association."

I shall pursue this debate no farther, except to say that it was continued by five or six others, among whom was Rev. Dr. Lothrop, who spoke briefly, but with great earnestness, force, and point, against the entire amendment, saying, among other things concerning Radicals, "If I belonged to them, I would go out from the Unitarian body, I would take my position upon the principles and ideas which I believed to be true, and, in the name of God and humanity, I would go to work behind those ideas, and if I could have power and success in the world, very well. That is the thing they ought to do, and not come here and insist that this body, called together on a different principle, receiving different traditions, pervaded in all ways by different influences, should stultify itself by so interpreting the preamble it adopted three years ago, that it shall mean nothing." To this I give a hearty Amen.

The previous question was at length called for; but at this moment, by general consent, Mr. Hale took the floor, and proceeded *to withdraw the amendment*, and to move as a substitute, — to become an article of the Constitution, — the Resolution as passed at Syracuse, in these words, —

"*Resolved*, That, to secure the largest unity of the Spirit and the widest practical co-operation, it is hereby understood that all declarations of this Conference, including the Preamble and Constitution, are expressions only of its majority, committing in no degree those who object to them, and dependent wholly for their effect upon the consent they command on their own merits from the churches here represented or belonging within the circle of our fellowship."

This substitute was adopted by a very large majority, only twelve voting in the negative. I have since regretted that my own vote had not made the minority thirteen. Here the matter rests. We stand where we stood at the assembling of the Conference, except that we have made what was a Resolution

an Article of the Constitution. We have shut nobody out. We have opened our doors no wider for anybody to come in. We have not "rejected Christ," as some are ready to assert. We have not declared that "he is no longer our authoritative head," as many believe. We have reaffirmed our Preamble, however inconsistent we may have been in adopting the explanatory Article.

One should be cautious and not over-sanguine in forecasting our future. There are tendencies, not hid, which are ominous; but there are also tendencies which are auspicious. These can never be blended into one force, nor co-operate for one end. They may be held in check for a time, and not manifest themselves in frequent collision; but the hour is coming when they will meet face to face, and the strongest prevail. This is a controversy of opinions, of ideas. As it states itself to my own mind, the question is simply this, Shall the gospel of Jesus Christ stand as the religion of humanity for the salvation of the race, or shall it give place to something else? Thank God! the controversy may be carried on peacefully, without acrimony, with decision and still with kindness, with the most scrupulous fidelity to conscientious convictions, and yet with that heavenly love in the soul which is higher than all knowledge and all faith. Who will not pray, "God give victory to his Truth!"

I wish I had time to tell you of the afternoon proceedings of "the stormy morning," as well as those of the next day. They were harmonious, energetic, full of a divine enthusiasm, beyond and above all cavil and all dissension. There was but one spirit, — the breath of all-holy and blessed God, — whether we listened to the story of the efforts in our neighboring city of Providence to bring its "unchurched" under religious influences; or to our brother Hepworth on "the Theatre-meeting movement," of which he is the head; or to

the elder Collyer on the important question of "Free Churches;" or to James Freeman Clarke on the working of the "Free Pew system" in his own church; or to Mr. Chaney on "Unions for Christian Work;" or to the voices of our colored brethren, whose brief speeches would have done honor to any white man present; or to Miss Amy Bradley, whose name is destined to be illustrious in the grand Educational Movement of the South; or to Mr. Dall, our solitary missionary to India, who has come home from that distant field laden with five years more of experience, with zeal unabated, and with such a record of his work as any man might be proud of, and who is consecrated for the residue of his life to that "pleasure of the Lord which has so prospered in his hands;" or to John Ware, unfolding his plan for the more efficient working of the financial machinery of our body; or to Dr. Bellows, relating the details of his observation, experience, and study in relation to Christianity during his recent extensive travels abroad, and particularly among our brethren in Great Britain, and urging upon the Liberal Christians of this country the great need of a church of our faith in the city of Paris. There was but one spirit, I say, during these closing sessions; and the impression left upon all minds was strong, that we had never more magnificent opportunities for Christian activity, were we but in a condition to use them; that the golden fruits of the best efforts for man, for Christ, for God, were never so nearly within our grasp — and yet might fail of being gathered — as at the present hour.

But your patience is wearied, and so is my own. I cannot recapitulate and sum up conclusions. I have tried to tell the plain story of the Conference. "Nothing has been extenuated, nor aught set down in malice." If I have referred to men by name, and with some freedom of criticism, I hope it has not been with discourtesy or unfairness. A single word,

in conclusion, for charity. Let us remember that, amid all the diversities of faith which the Christian world exhibits, God is slowly building up, by means of them, a kingdom of human hearts in the image of his Son, to throb with heavenly aspirations, to melt with divine sympathies, to kindle to noble endeavors in behalf of human virtue and blessedness; and that such hearts are often found in connection, on the one hand, with religious systems abhorrent to reason, and on the other with sceptical speculations which we cannot but condemn as subversive of Christianity.

I dismiss my Report with the devout hope that when the Conference again assembles, its members may be in closer fellowship one with another, because in tenderer and profounder sympathy with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and that all our undertakings meanwhile may be so guided by the Eternal Wisdom that they shall be for the good of man and the glory of God!

Note. — This Report was made from a pretty full brief, but in writing it out for publication it will be seen, by those who heard it, that some things have been left out, and others added; while of the main points the substance, and, in great part, the language, are unchanged.